

James Madison to James Monroe, February 10, 1820. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

TO JAMES MONROE. MAD. MSS.

Montplr., Feby 10, 1820.

Dear Sir, —I have duly recd. your favr. of the 5th, followed by a copy of the public documents, for which I give you many thanks. I shd. like to get a copy of the Journals of the Convention.¹ Are they to be purchased & where?

¹ The *Journal, Acts and Proceedings of the Convention*, etc., Boston, 1819, published by authority of joint resolution of Congress of March 27, 1818. *Ante*, III., p. xiv.

It appears to me as it does to you, that a coupling of Missouri with Maine, in order to force the entrance of the former thro' the door voluntarily opened to the latter is, to say the least, a very doubtful policy. Those who regard the claims of both as similar & equal, and distrust the views of such as wish to disjoin them may be strongly tempted to resort to the expedient; and it wd. perhaps, be too much to say that in no possible case such a resort cd. be justified. But it may at least be said that a very peculiar case only could supersede the general policy of a direct & magnanimous course, appealing to the justice & liberality of others, and trusting to the influence of conciliatory example.

I find the idea is fast spreading that the zeal wth. which the extension, so called, of slavery is opposed, has, with the coalesced *leaders*, an object very different from the welfare of the slaves, of the check to their increase; and that their real object is, as you intimate,

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to form a new state of parties founded on local instead of political distinctions; thereby dividing the Republicans of the North from those of the South, and making the former instrumental in giving to the opponents of both an ascendancy over the whole. If this be the view of the subject at Washington it furnishes an additional reason for a conciliatory proceeding in relation to Maine.

I have been truly astonished at some of the doctrines and deliberations to which the Missouri question has led; and particularly so at the interpretations put on the

terms "migration or importation &c." Judging from my own impressions I shd. deem it impossible that the memory of any one who was a member of the Genl. Convention, could favor an opinion that the terms did not *exclusively* refer to Migration & importation *into the U. S.* Had they been understood in that Body in the sense now put on them, it is easy to conceive the alienation they would have there created in certain States; And no one can decide better than yourself the effect they would have had in the State Conventions, if such a meaning had been avowed by the Advocates of the Constitution. If a suspicion had existed of such a construction, it wd. at least have made a conspicuous figure among the amendments proposed to the Instrument.

I have observed *as yet*, in none of the views taken of the Ordinance of 1787, interdicting slavery N. W. of the Ohio, an allusion to the circumstance, that when it passed, the Congs. had no authority to prohibit the importation of slaves from abroad; that all the States had, & some were in the full exercise of the right to import them; and, consequently, that there was no mode in which Congs. could check the evil, but the indirect one of narrowing the space open for the reception of slaves. Had a federal authority then existed to prohibit directly & totally the importation from abroad, can it be doubted that it wd. have been exerted? and that a regulation having merely the effect of preventing an interior dispersion of the slaves actually in the U. S. & creating a distinction among the States in the degrees of their sovereignty, would not have been adopted, or perhaps, thought of?

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No folly in the Spanish Govt. can now create surprise. I wish you happily thro' the thorny circumstances it throws in your way. Adieu &c.